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U.S. Official Reporting Gains On a Chinese Nuclear Accord

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WASHINGTON, July 9 — A Reagan Administration official said today that the United States and China had made progress on a nuclear energy accord that has been held up for a year.

The official said the pact would be concluded in time for a visit by President Li Xiannian of China in two weeks. Other officials cautioned that technical details could delay completion.

The accord would allow American companies to compete for contracts in building Chinese nuclear power stations. It would also commit China, which has nuclear weapons, not to aid other countries in developing them, as China has already publicly pledged.

The agreement would end a difficult period in relations with China that began when the White House rushed the accord to completion so that President Reagan would have something to announce on a visit to Peking in 1984.

The accord was initialed during the visit and should have been routinely sent to Congress for approval. But when United States officials began studying it, they said that China, according to intelligence information, might be in violation by helping Pakistan develop nuclear weapons.

Embarrassed by the development, the Administration sought clarification from Peking, but the Chinese balked at reopening negotiations.

Earlier this year, China showed new interest, and Richard T. Kennedy of the State Department made an unpublished trip to Peking in June. Mr. Kennedy is special adviser to Secretary of State George P. Shultz on curbing the spread of nuclear weapons.

A State Department official said today that the problem was to make sure that when China and the United States say they will not help others develop nuclear weapons. "it means the same

to them as it does to us."

China apparently believes that a device it is giving to Pakistan is allowed, while the United States says it is not. The State Department official said the language of the pact was not changed, but an exchange of views on interpretation now satisfied the Americans.

China has made no secret of its desire to move ahead with the project. It already has similar pacts with Japan and Western European countries, but any contracts are unlikely until the American accord is concluded since the United States controls much nuclear technology.

Kenneth L. Adelman, director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, will have to certify that the Chinese accord does not conflict with the international 1968 treaty banning the spread of nuclear weapons, which entered into force for the United States in 1970.

The Chinese have refused to join that treaty because they view it as an effort by the United States and the Soviet Union to try to dominate others.